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No. 434

TALES FROM THE KATHA-SARITSAGARA

# THE CHOSEN BRIDEGROOM





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## THE CHOSEN BRIDEGROOM

Kathasaritasagara, the ocean of stories is among the earliest collection of stories extant in the world. It was compiled by a brahmin named Somadeva for the amusement of Suryavati, wife of King Ananta of Kashmir, at whose court Somadeva was a poet.

Myriad streams of myth and mystery flow in to create this fanciful and fascinating ocean – tales of wondrous maidens and their fearless lovers, of kings and cities, of statecraft and intrigue, of magic and spells, of treachery and trickery, of ghosts and goblins.

"The chosen bridegroom" and "The Gods as witnesses" in this volume are based on stories from Somadeva's Kathasaritasagara.

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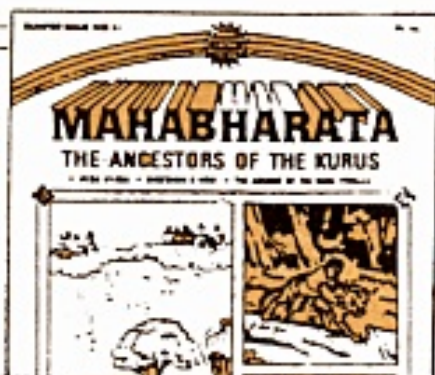
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# THE CHOSEN BRIDEGROOM

THERE RULED IN THE CITY OF AYODHYA, KING VIRAKETU. PEOPLE FELT HAPPY AND SAFE IN HIS CARE.



THE LEADING MERCHANT OF THE CITY WAS RATNADATTA. ONE DAY—

CONGRATULATIONS, MASTER! YOUR WIFE NANDAYANTI HAS GIVEN BIRTH TO A LOVELY DAUGHTER.



WHAT A GEM! WE'LL CALL HER RATNAVATI.



RATNAVATI GREW UP TO BE A LOVELY, GRACEFUL YOUNG LADY.

SO MANY SUITORS HAVE COME FOR RATNAVATI'S HAND.

BUT SHE IS REFUSING TO GET MARRIED.









VIRAKETU CALLED HIS SOLDIERS.

POST MORE SEPOYS FOR THE NIGHT WATCH. ALL ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES TO THE TOWN MUST BE ENTERED IN A REGISTER.



THE THIEVES ARE VERY CUNNING, YOUR MAJESTY. THEY WEAR SPECIAL SHOES WHICH MAKE REVERSE FOOTPRINTS.

WELL, LET'S TRAIN OUR MEN TO TRACK THEM.



YOU MUST CATCH THEM, DEAD OR ALIVE.



DESPITE ALL THE EFFORTS OF THE SOLDIERS THE ROBBERIES CONTINUED.

THE THIEVING AND LOOTING HASN'T STOPPED.

MY SOLDIERS ARE DOING THEIR BEST. WE HAVE HIRED SPECIAL WATCHMEN, INCREASED THE NIGHT PATROL AND YET...



THE KING THOUGHT FOR A WHILE.

TONIGHT I WILL USE A NEW PLAN. GOD WILLING, I WILL SOON REMOVE ALL YOUR ANXIETY.

THANK YOU, YOUR MAJESTY.





AT NIGHT THE KING WAS BUSY IN HIS PRIVATE CHAMBER.

THERE! I'VE DARKENED MY FACE WITH PAINT. NOW I'LL TIE MY BEARD UP.



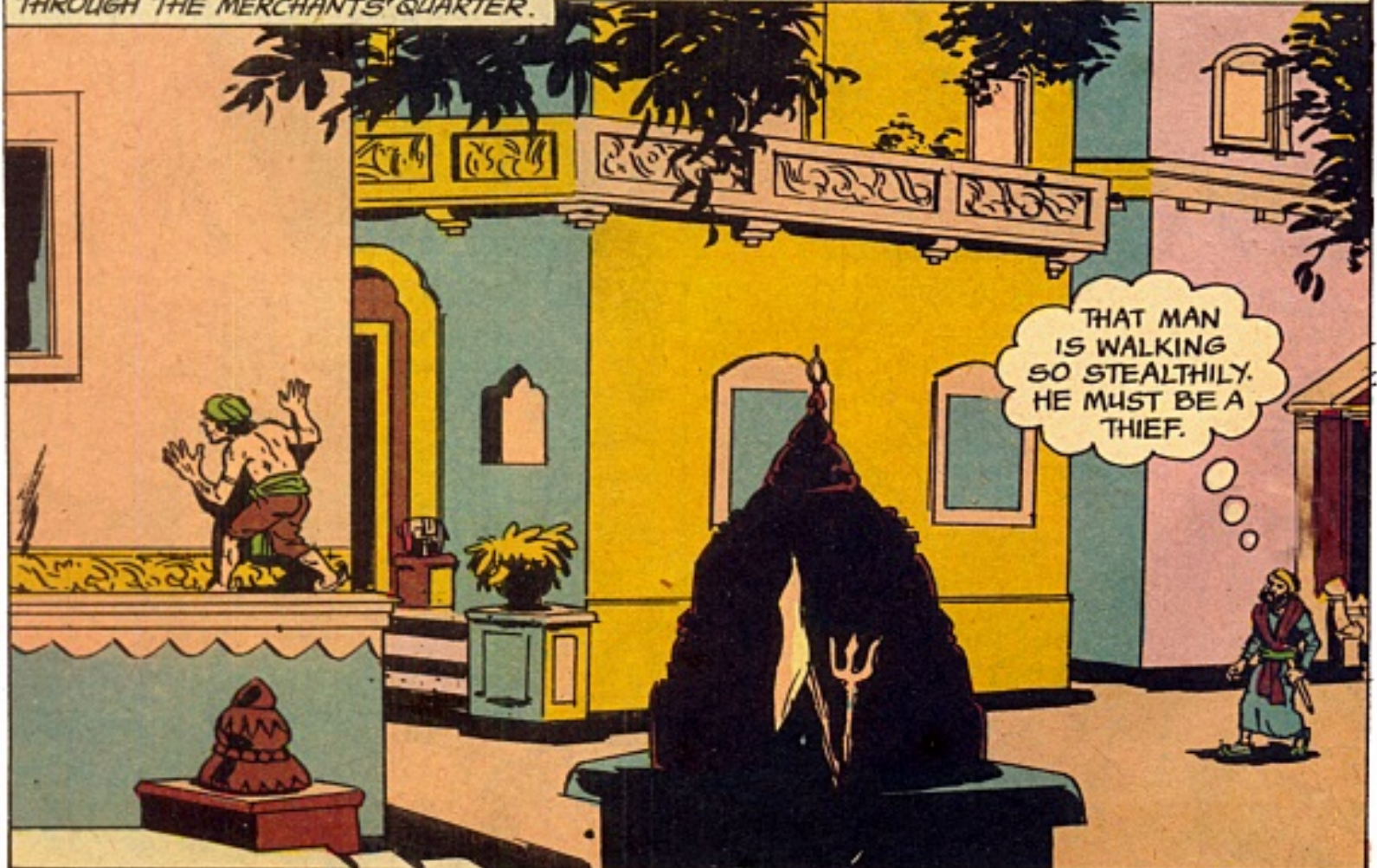
WITH THIS LONG HAIR FROM MY HORSE'S TAIL I'LL TIE UP MY NOSE. HMM, IT LOOKS DIFFERENT NOW.



REPLACING HIS SILKEN ROYAL ROBE WITH A ROUGH CLOAK HE STEPPED OUT IN THE DARK.

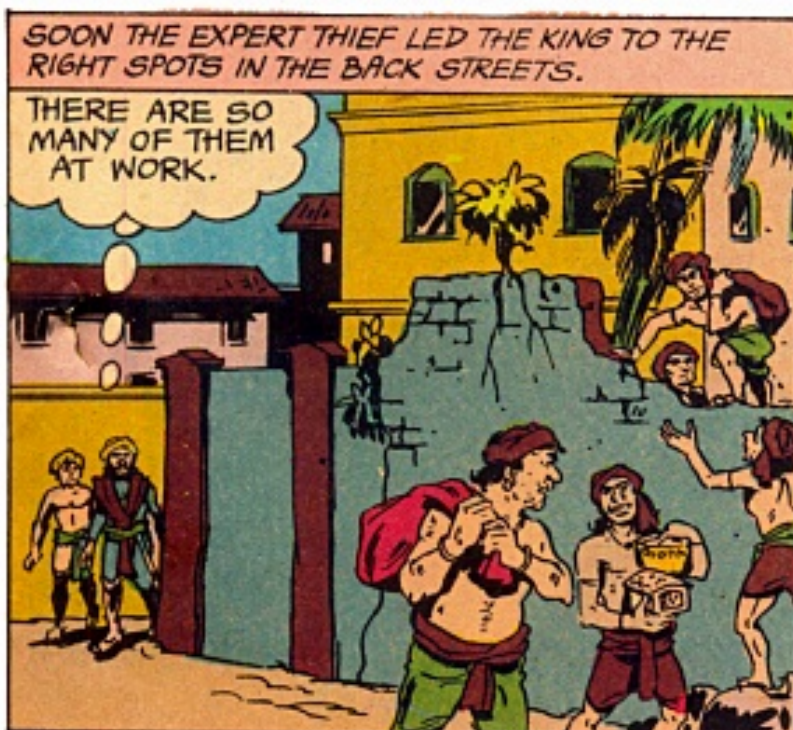


FOR AN HOUR OR TWO, THE KING WALKED THROUGH THE DARK SILENT STREETS. AS HE PASSED THROUGH THE MERCHANTS' QUARTER.





THE MAN SPRANG UP WITH A CRY WHEN THE KING TAPPED HIS SHOULDER.





THE KING WAS FAMILIAR WITH THE LANGUAGE OF THIEVES BY NOW.

HE MEANS WE'LL GO TO THE DEN OF THIEVES AND HAVE A DRINK.

YES, LET'S DO THAT.

THE THIEF LED HIM TO A ROCKY HILL A FEW KILOMETRES FROM THE CITY.

TOOT!  
TOOT!

HOOT!  
HOOT!

A DOZEN ARMED MEN SPRANG UP FROM THE GRASS NEAR THE ROCK.

AH! THAT'S THE SECRET SIGNAL FOR ENTERING THE DEN.

THEY WERE LED IN THROUGH A CLEVERLY HIDDEN ENTRANCE TO THE JUNGLE.

I'LL MARK THE TREES SECRETLY WITH MY DAGGER.

AT LAST THEY REACHED A STEEP HIGH ROCK WHOSE SIDE WAS COVERED WITH HAND PRINTS. THE KING IMITATED HIS COMPANION.

I'LL ALSO MAKE MY PALM-PRINTS WITH VERMILION PASTE HERE.

TOGETHER THEY HEAVED UP A BULKY TRAP DOOR.

HUFF!

PUFF!



THEY CLIMBED DOWN A BAMBOO LADDER. THE SUDDEN LOUD VOICES AND BRIGHT LIGHT SURPRISED THE KING.



ON THE RICH CARPETS SPREAD ON THE FLOOR WERE HUNDREDS OF WALLETS, BAGS, WEAPONS, GOBLETS AND JARS OF WINE.



THE NEXT ROOM WAS FILLED WITH THUGS AND THIEVES WASHING BLOOD FROM THEIR HAND AND REMOVING THEIR DISGUISE.



THE KING'S COMPANION WAS GREETED LIKE A CHIEF.

HELLO, CHIEF!

HOW WAS THE NIGHT?

HERE IS ANOTHER ADDITION TO OUR GANG.

GOOD!





SOON THE GANG ATE, DRANK AND ONE BY ONE DROPPED OFF TO SLEEP.



SUDDENLY A MAID SERVANT WHO RECOGNIZED THE KING CAME FORWARD.

O KING VIRAKETH!  
WHAT ARE YOU DOING  
HERE? THEY WILL  
KILL YOU IF THEY  
RECOGNIZE YOU.  
RUN AWAY.



THE OLD LADY LED HIM ACROSS THE SLEEPING BODIES TO A SECRET EXIT OF THE CAVE.

I'D BETTER MARK  
THIS EXIT  
CAREFULLY.



AT DAWN HE WAS BACK IN THE PALACE. AS SOON AS HE APPEARED IN THE DURBAR—

O KING, YOU PROMISED TO  
PROTECT US. BUT THE ROBBERY  
LAST NIGHT WAS  
THE BIGGEST.

JUST GIVE  
ME ANOTHER  
DAY.



HE SUMMONED HIS GROUP OF EXPERT ARCHERS.

KEEP READY TONIGHT  
FOR A SECRET  
MISSION.





WHEN IT WAS PAST MIDNIGHT HE LED THEM TO THE THIEVES' DEN.

THIS IS THE WAY TO THEIR DEN. WE WILL CAPTURE THEM BEFORE THEY SET OUT FOR ROBBING.

MEANWHILE SOON AFTER KING VIRAKETU LEFT THE DEN—

HEY, WHERE IS THAT NEW FELLOW?

HE HAS DISAPPEARED.

I HEARD THE MAID-SERVANT WHISPERING TO HIM. CATCH HER.

I SUSPECT HE WAS A SPY.

ON BEING THREATENED THE OLD LADY CONFESSED.

IT WAS K-KING VIRAKETU.

WE'D BETTER BE PREPARED.

HE'LL SURELY COME TO CAPTURE US SOON.

LET'S RUN AWAY!

NOW IN DAYLIGHT WE'LL SURELY BE CAUGHT.

THE CHIEF THOUGHT FOR A WHILE.

NO, WE WILL NOT RUN AWAY. WE WILL CONFRONT HIM.

YES, CHIEF! WE'LL DO AS YOU SAY.



THEY SPENT THE DAY SHARPENING THEIR DAGGERS AND CHECKING THEIR WEAPONS. AT NIGHTFALL —



THE REST OF THE GANG STEALTHILY FOLLOWED THE CHIEF AS HE POSITIONED HIMSELF IN THE WOODS.



THE KING'S SOLDIERS WERE CAUGHT BY SURPRISE.



THE BRAVE VIRAKETU CONFRONTED HIS OPPONENT. HE DREW HIS SWORD AND A DUEL ENSUED.



THEY BENT, SKIPPED, JUMPED OUTMANOEUVERING EACH OTHER TILL THEY WERE EXHAUSTED.



BOTH WERE WELL MATCHED IN SKILL AND COURAGE AND THE BATTLE SEEMED UNENDING. AT LAST THE KING CLEVERLY DISARMED HIS OPPONENT.



RUN FOR YOUR LIVES. OUR CHIEF IS DEFEATED.



THE KING CALLED FOR THE FEW REMAINING MEN FROM HIS ARMY.

CAPTURE HIM!



TYING HIS HANDS BEHIND HIM, THE CHIEF WAS BROUGHT TO THE PALACE.

LET HIM BE BATHED AND DRESSED IN FINE CLOTHES AND LOCKED UP.





THE STOLEN GOODS WERE BROUGHT FROM THE THIEVES' DEN TO THE PALACE. NEXT MORNING THE ROBBER WAS MOUNTED ON A CAMEL AND TAKEN AROUND THE CITY.



GATHER AT THE MAIDAN\* THIS EVENING AND SEE HOW HE IS PUNISHED FOR HIS EVIL DEEDS.



PEOPLE CRANED THEIR NECKS TO CATCH SIGHT OF THE PRISONER.

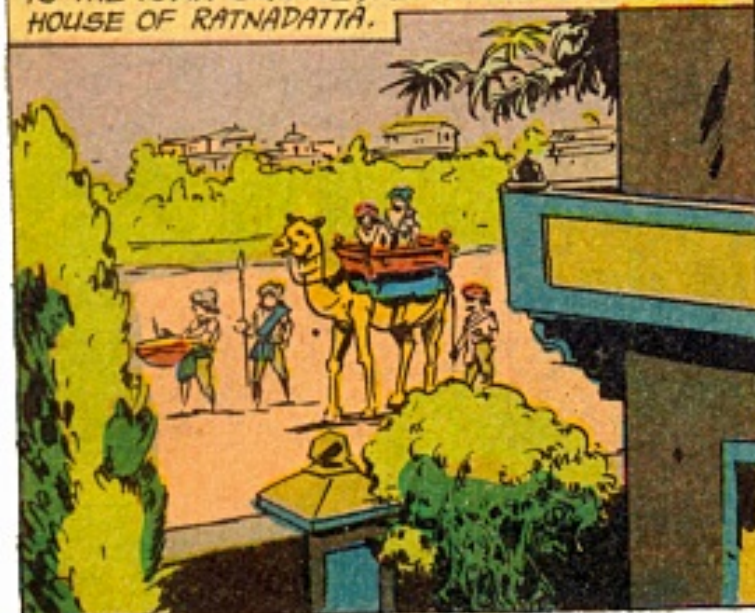
HE'LL BE EXECUTED TODAY.

IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE.

SERVES HIM RIGHT, THE VILLAIN!



IN THE EVENING AS THE THIEF WAS BEING LED TO THE TOWN SQUARE, HE PASSED BY THE HOUSE OF RATNAVATI.



THE TUMULT DREW RATNAVATI TO THE WINDOW OF HER CHAMBER.

OH! WHAT A HAND-SOME MAN. I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYONE LIKE HIM.





THOUGH THE THIEF WAS WOUNDED AND COVERED WITH DUST RATNAVATI WAS SMITTEN WITH LOVE FOR HIM.





RATNAVATI WAS DETERMINED—

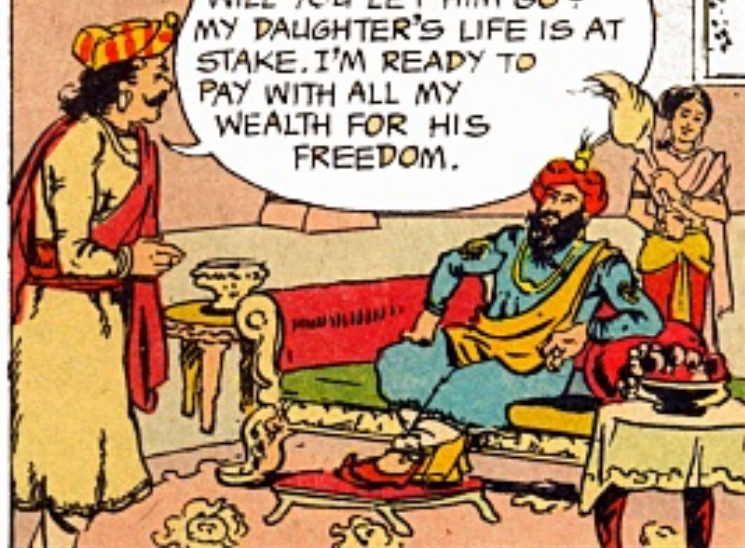
YOU MUST ARRANGE TO FREE HIM, FATHER, OR I'LL KILL MYSELF TOO.

I'LL TRY TO PERSUADE THE KING.



RATNADATTA WENT TO THE PALACE TO PLEAD WITH THE KING.

WILL YOU LET HIM GO? MY DAUGHTER'S LIFE IS AT STAKE. I'M READY TO PAY WITH ALL MY WEALTH FOR HIS FREEDOM.



NO! I CANNOT FREE HIM. HE HAS BEEN PLUNDERING OUR TOWN. I RISKED MY OWN LIFE TO CAPTURE HIM.



DISAPPOINTED, RATNADATTA RETURNED HOME.

THE KING REFUSED TO FREE YOUR CHOSEN MAN.

IF HE DIES, I TOO WILL GIVE UP MY LIFE.



MUCH AS HER PARENTS TRIED TO DISSUADE HER, RATNAVATI DRESSED UP AND WENT TO THE PUBLIC SQUARE.

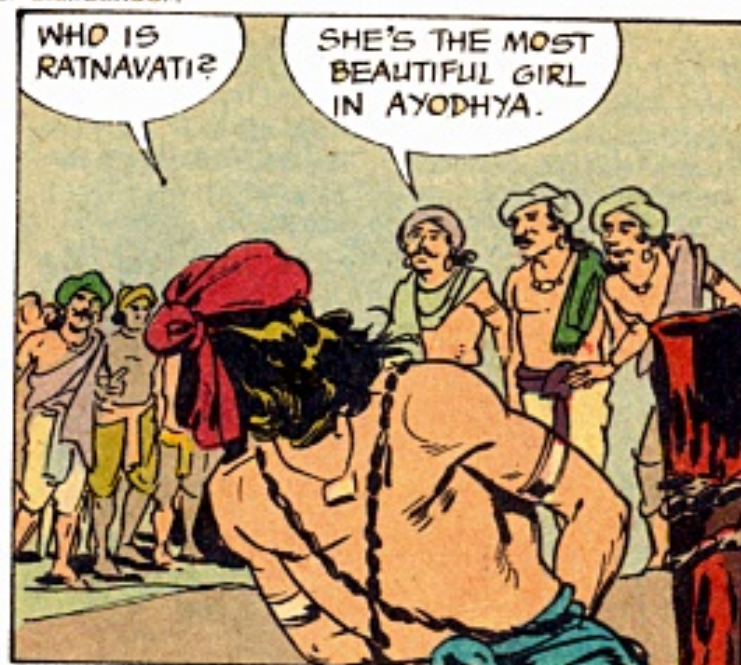
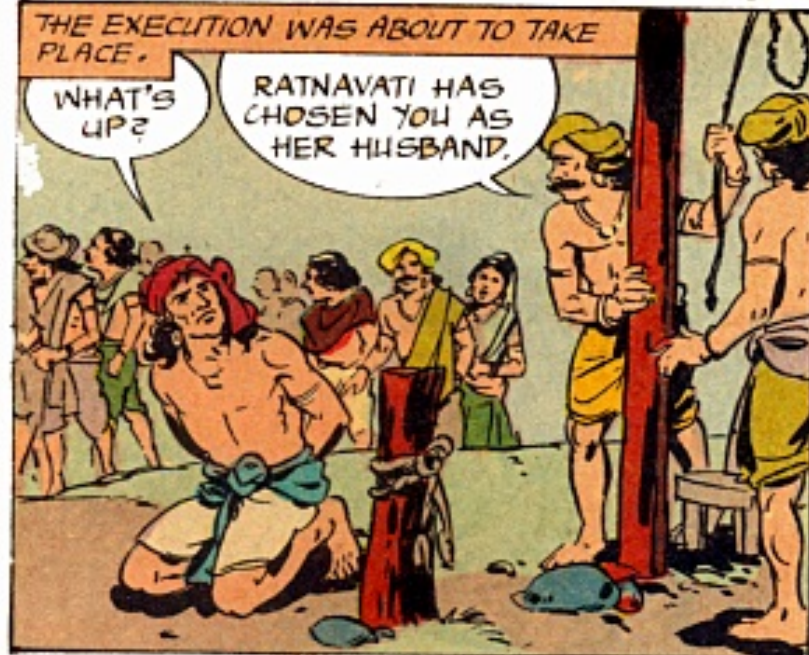
LOOK, THERE SHE IS!

SHE WANTS TO MARRY THE THIEF!

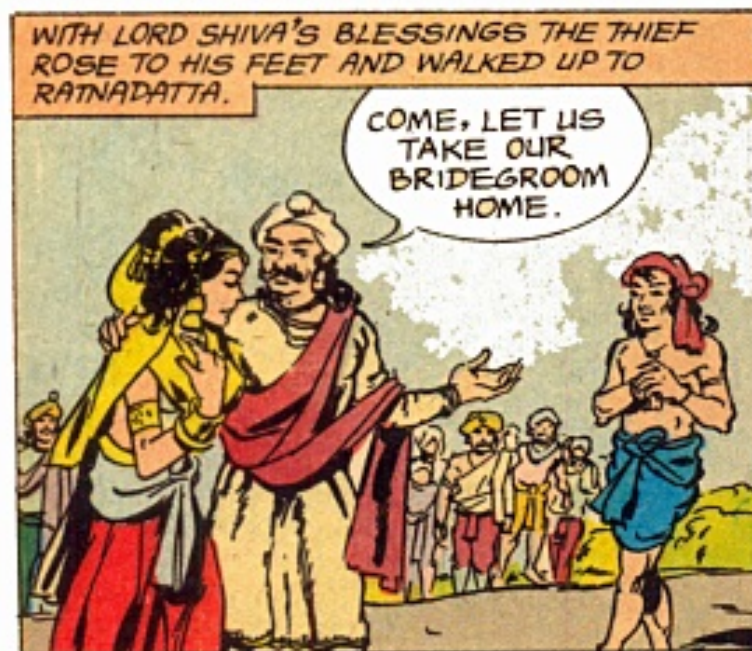
OF ALL PEOPLE.







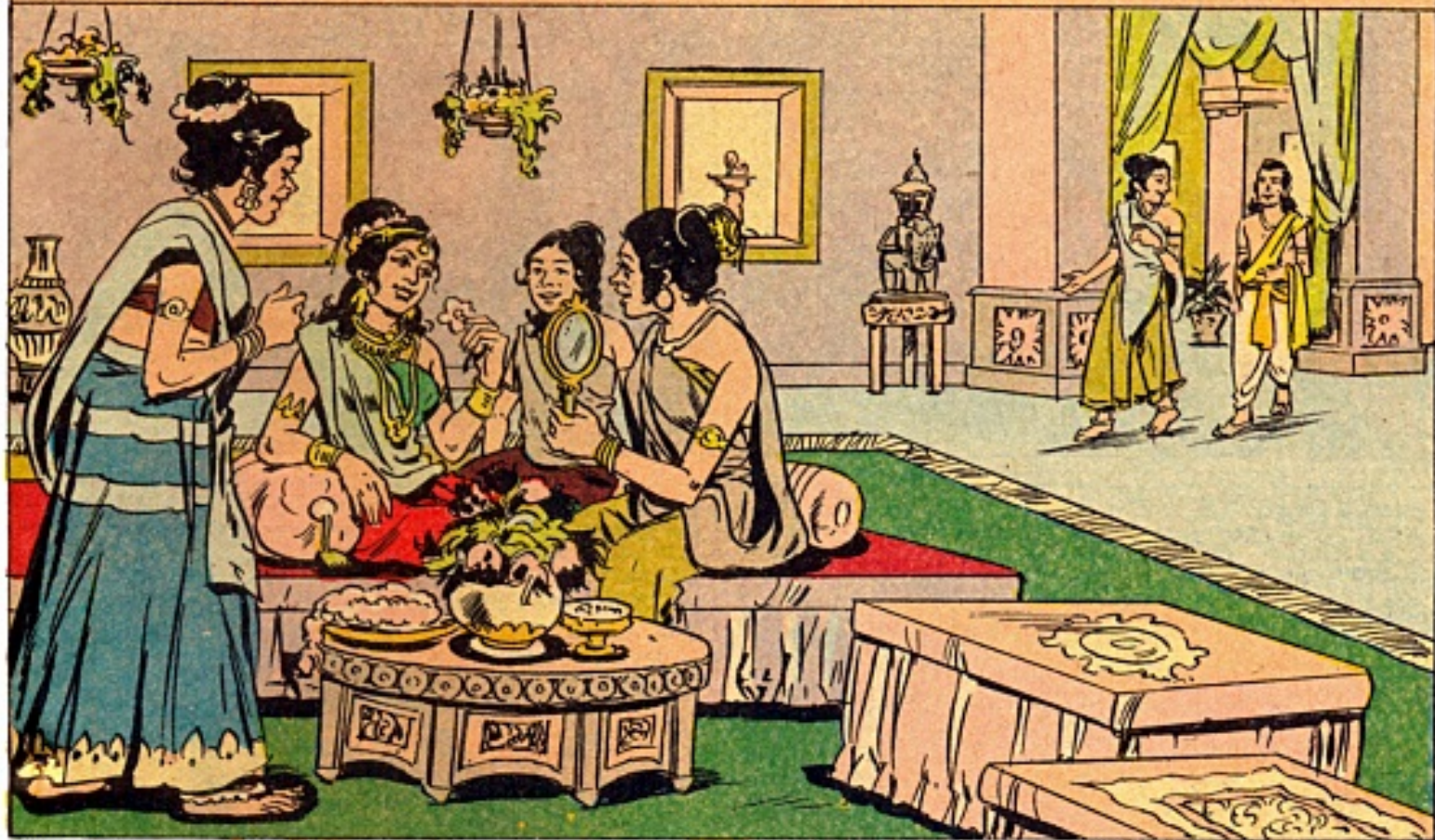






# THE GODS AS WITNESSES

UPAKOSHA, THE MOST BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN IN PATALIPUTRA, WAS BETROTHED TO VARARUCHI.

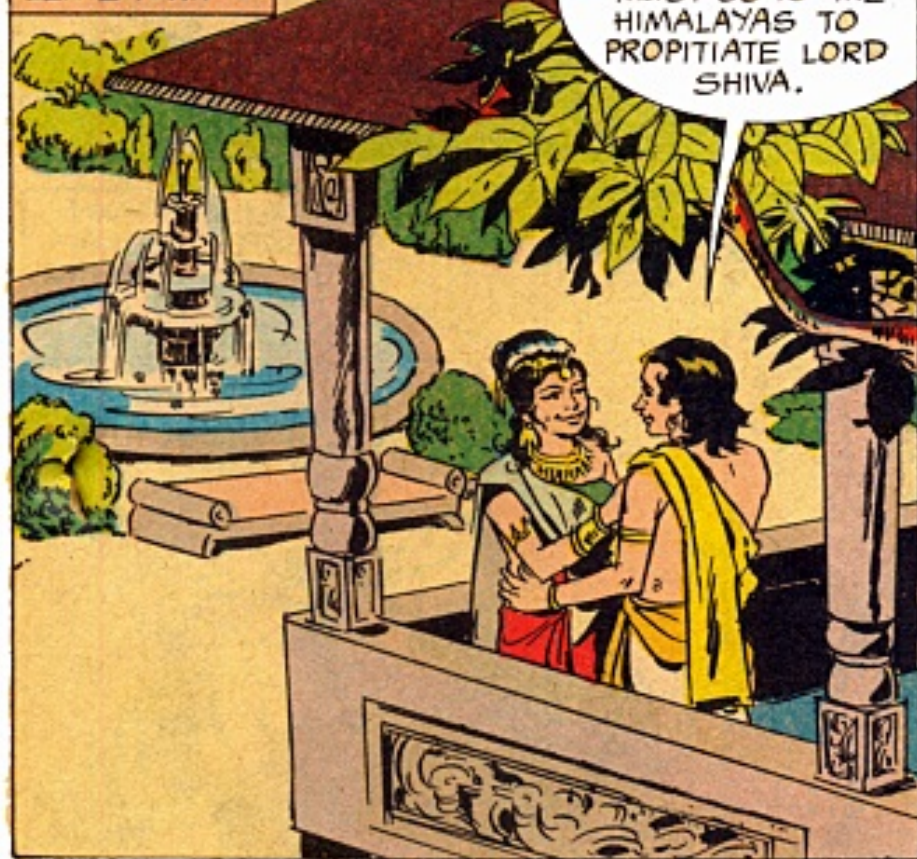


WHEN VARARUCHI WAS ABOUT TO LEAVE TOWN—

UPAKOSHA, I  
MUST GO TO THE  
HIMALAYAS TO  
PROPITIATE LORD  
SHIVA.

I MAY BE AWAY FOR  
LONG, SO I'VE LEFT MY  
WEALTH WITH THE  
MERCHANT HIRANYAGUPTA.  
YOU MAY ASK HIM  
WHENEVER YOU ARE  
IN NEED.

I'LL WAIT  
ANXIOUSLY  
FOR YOUR  
RETURN.





AS THE DAYS PASSED, UPAKOSHA GREW THIN AND WAN. LISTLESSLY SHE WENT ABOUT HER DAILY CHORES.



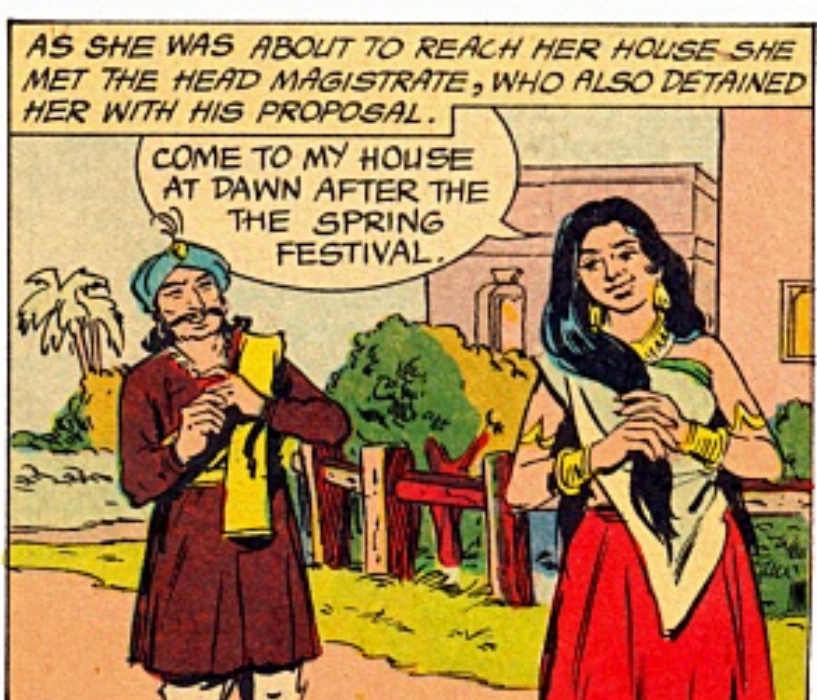
ONE DAY AS SHE WAS RETURNING HOME AFTER HER EVENING BATH, THE MINISTER AT THE ROYAL COURT SAW HER.



WHEN HE PERSISTED, UPAKOSHA QUICKLY THOUGHT OF A PLAN.









I CAN NO LONGER LIVE HERE.  
I'D BETTER LEAVE THE TOWN.  
BUT I NEED MONEY FOR  
THE TRAVEL EXPENSES.



SHE WENT TO HIRANYAGUPTA, THE MERCHANT.

I NEED SOME MONEY  
URGENTLY. VARARUCHI HAD  
TOLD ME, HE'D DEPOSITED  
HIS WEALTH WITH YOU.



WITH ME?  
OF COURSE  
NOT!

YOU SAY SO BECAUSE VARARUCHI  
DID NOT CARE TO LEAVE  
A WRITTEN RECORD. THIS  
ISN'T FAIR, SIR.



LISTEN, PRETTY ONE,  
IF YOU CONSENT TO BE  
MY WIFE, I'LL BESTOW  
ALL MY WEALTH ON  
YOU. WHAT VARARUCHI  
LEFT WITH ME IS  
NOTHING IN  
COMPARISON.

THAT MEANS YOU  
ADMIT VARARUCHI  
LEFT HIS MONEY  
WITH YOU.



I ADMIT NOTHING.  
CAN YOU PRODUCE A  
WITNESS TO SAY THAT  
I HAVE HIS MONEY?  
MY PROPOSAL IS  
BETTER.

HMM. LET ME  
THINK ABOUT IT.  
I'LL GIVE MY REPLY  
AFTER THE SPRING  
FESTIVAL.



UPAKOSHA NOW BEGAN TO PLAN FOR VASANT  
PANCHAMI.

PREPARE A LARGE VAT OF  
LAMPBLACK MIXED  
WITH OIL.









ELATED AT BEING THUS WELCOMED, THE MINISTER AGREED. HE WAS LED INTO A DIMLY LIT INNER CHAMBER.

HERE'S A SPECIAL UNGUENT WE'VE MADE FOR YOU.



THEY TOOK A LONG TIME ANOINTING HIM WITH THE UNGUENT WHICH HE COULD SMELL BUT NOT SEE. JUST THEN—

KNOCK KNOCK



IT IS THE ROYAL TREASURER!

OH! HE IS VARARUCHI'S FRIEND. HIDE! HIDE!



WHERE?

IN THIS TRUNK!



BUT MY CLOTHES?

LATER! HURRY UP AND GET IN. THERE'S NO TIME!



NOW THE NEXT ONE!

THE TREASURER.





THEY BROUGHT THE TREASURER INSIDE THE DIMLY LIT ROOM.

OH SIR! YOU MUST BE WEARY FROM YOUR ROYAL DUTIES.

OUR MISTRESS HAS MADE THIS SPECIAL LINGUENT TO GIVE YOU A SOOTHING MASSAGE.



UNSUSPECTING, THE TREASURER SUCCLIMBED TO THE MASSAGE.

GOOD! HE'S ALL COVERED WITH LAMPBLACK.

NO ONE WOULD RECOGNIZE HIM NOW.



JUST THEN—

THE HEAD MAGISTRATE IS HERE.

OH! I'M DONE FOR!



DON'T WORRY! WE'LL HIDE YOU.

GET IN HERE, QUICK!



SOON IT WAS THE MAGISTRATE'S TURN TO ENJOY THE DELIGHTFUL MASSAGE.

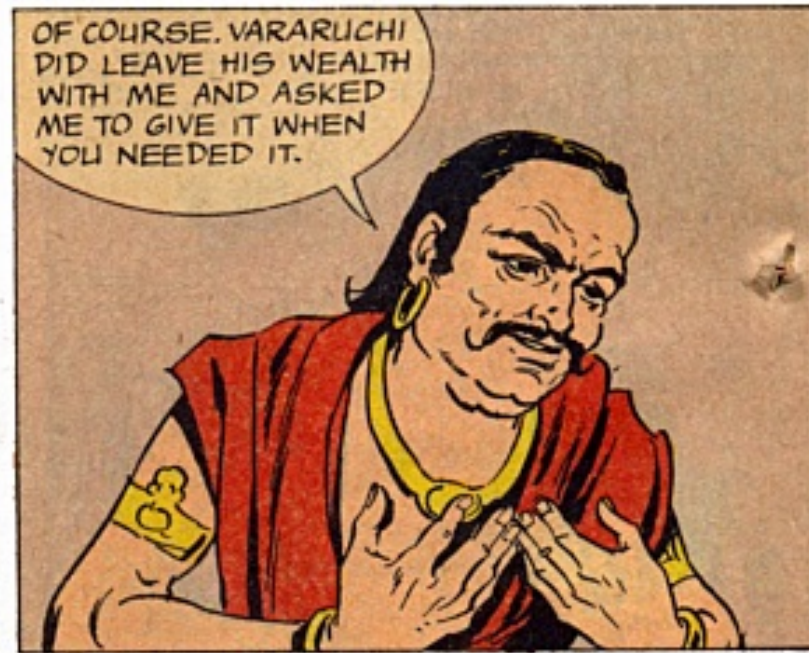
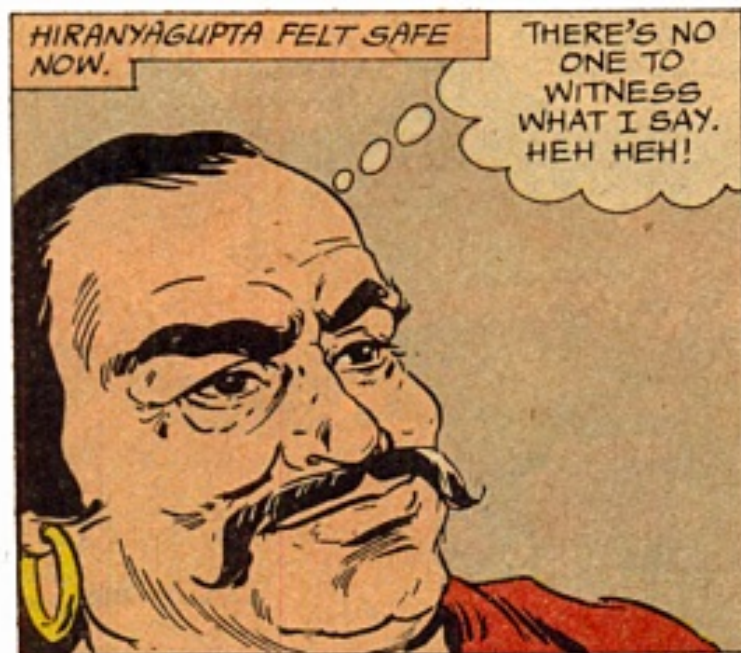


MEANWHILE—

SEND WORD TO HIRANYA-GUPTA, THE MERCHANT, THAT I'M READY TO REPLY TO HIM.









UPAKOSHA ACCOMPANIED BY HER MAIDS  
WENT TO THE COURT OF KING NANDA.

YOUR MAJESTY! THE  
MERCHANT HIRANYAGUPTA  
IS TRYING TO CHEAT  
ME.



THE WICKED HIRANYAGUPTA PRETENDED  
IGNORANCE.

NO, YOUR MAJESTY, I  
HAVE NOTHING IN MY  
KEEPING BELONGING  
TO THIS LADY.



SOON—

IS IT TRUE THAT  
VARARUCHI LEFT HIS  
WEALTH WITH YOU TO BE  
GIVEN TO THIS LADY?



OH! YOUR MAJESTY, I  
HAVE WITNESSES.  
BEFORE HE LEFT,  
VARARUCHI HAD PUT  
THE HOUSEHOLD  
DEITIES IN A BOX.



THIS MERCHANT ADMITTED  
THE DEPOSIT IN THEIR  
PRESENCE, YOU CAN ASK  
THE GODS YOURSELF.

LET  
THE BOX  
BE BROUGHT  
TO THE  
COURT.



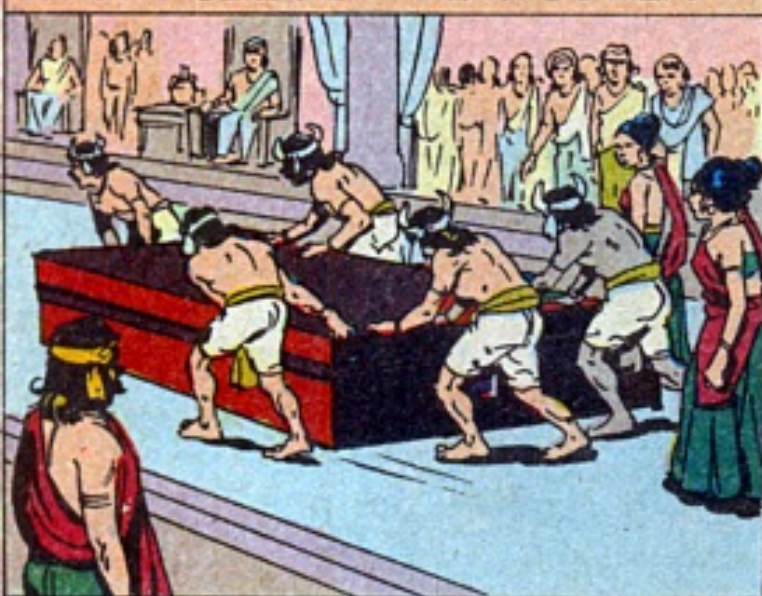
IT IS A RATHER HEAVY  
BOX. IT MAY NEED  
SEVEN OR EIGHT  
MEN TO LIFT IT.

TAKE A  
DOZEN SOLDIERS  
AND FETCH THE  
BOX HERE.





THE HEAVY TRUNK WAS BROUGHT TO THE COURT BY SEVERAL OF THE KING'S MEN.



DRAMATICALLY RAISING HER HANDS SKYWARDS UPAKOSHA SAID—



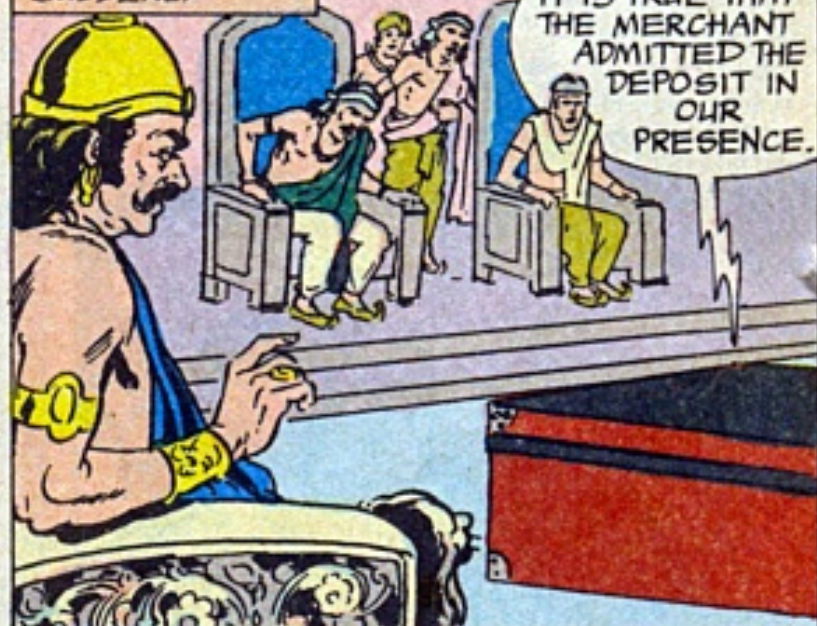
RELATE TRULY, O GODS, WHAT THE MERCHANT SAID.

NO SOUND CAME FROM THE TRUNK.

SPEAK UP, O LORDS, WHO DWELL INSIDE THE TRUNK. ELSE I'LL BURN YOU OR OPEN THE BOX IN THE COURT.



SUDDENLY—



IT IS TRUE THAT THE MERCHANT ADMITTED THE DEPOSIT IN OUR PRESENCE.

YES! YES, WE CAN VOUCH FOR IT.

INDEED HE HAS ADMITTED TO VARARUCHI HAVING DEPOSITED HIS WEALTH WITH HIM.




HIRANYAGUPTA WAS BESIDE HIMSELF WITH FEAR—

OH DEAR! HER GODS ARE REALLY POWERFUL AND PROTECTIVE TOWARDS HER.







QUICKLY HE BENT BEFORE THE KING—



FORGIVE ME, YOUR MAJESTY. I DID INDEED ACCEPT THE MONEY FROM VARARUCHI...




GO AT ONCE AND GET HER MONEY.



BUT KING NANDA'S CURIOSITY WAS AROUSED. CAN I HAVE A LOOK AT YOUR HOUSEHOLD DEITIES?


HOW CAN I REFUSE A ROYAL REQUEST, YOUR HIGHNESS?



WH-WHAT ON EARTH? WHO ARE THESE? THEY LOOK ALMOST HUMAN.



THEY LOOK FAMILIAR LET THEM BE BROUGHT OUT FROM THE TRUNK.



OH! IT'S MY TREASURER.

WHAT A SIGHT!

HA! HA!





WHEN UPAKOSHA RETURNED HOME LADEN WITH PRESENTS GIVEN BY KING NANDA, SHE WAS GREETED WITH SMILES OF ADMIRATION FROM THE CITIZENS OF PATALIPUTRA.





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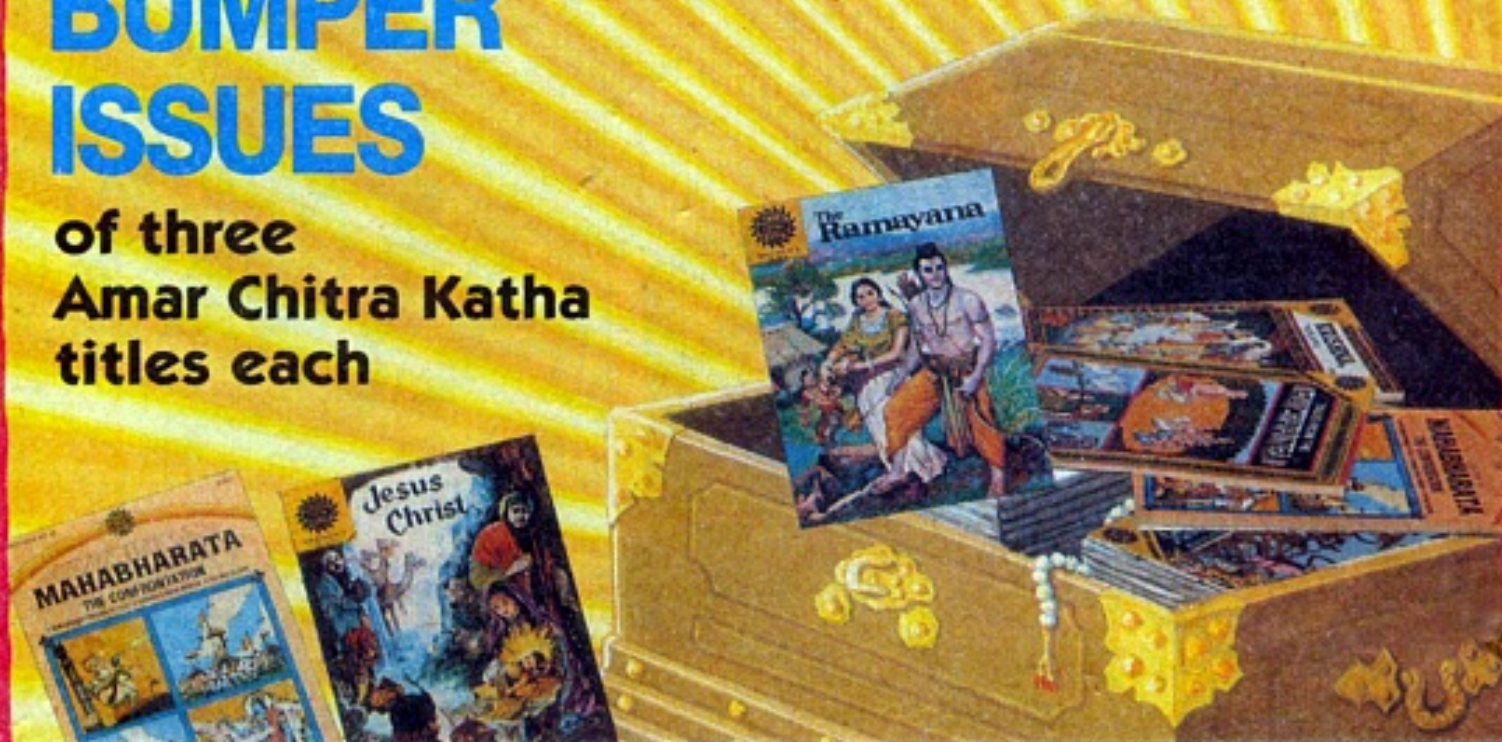


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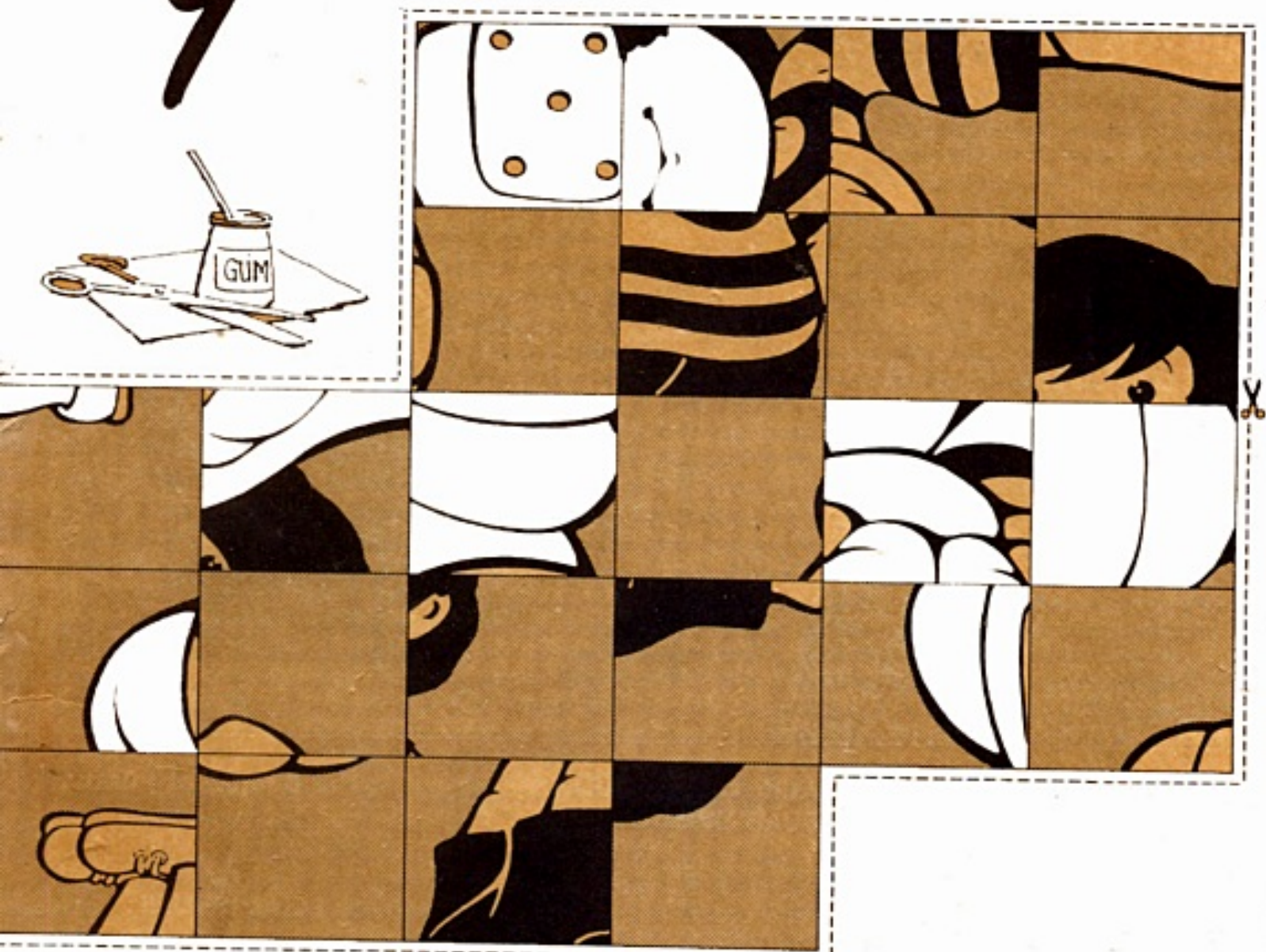


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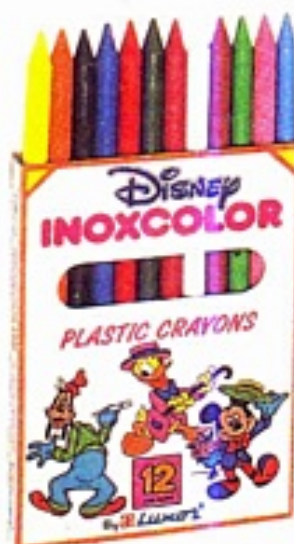
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